

# Arlington Historic District Commissions



## Design Guidelines for Local Historic Districts

Adopted January 2004  
(revised August 2004)

## **Arlington Historic District Commissions**

[www.arlingtonhistoricdistrict.com](http://www.arlingtonhistoricdistrict.com)

Andrea Alberg (At-Large)  
Beth Cohen (Pleasant)  
Madelon Hope-Berkowitz (At-Large)  
Len Kuhn (At-Large)  
Michael Logan (Avon Place) Vice Chairperson  
Yvonne Logan (At-large)  
Stephen Makowka (Russell) Chairperson  
Martha Penzenik (At-Large)  
Margaret Potter (Jason/Gray)  
John L. Worden III (At-Large) Secretary

Carol Greeley, Executive Secretary  
15 Temple Street  
Arlington, MA 02476  
(781) 316-3265  
[cgreeley@comcast.net](mailto:cgreeley@comcast.net)

**Almost all construction work on the outside of a property located in a Historic District, including fences, requires review by the Historic District Commission and in many cases a building permit from the Building Department. Always check with the Commission and the Building Department before having such exterior work performed.**

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>What Changes are Reviewed .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Certificate Process .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Design Review Principles .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>General Design Guidelines.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Specific Design Guidelines .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Walls and Trim .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Windows.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Doors, Stairs, Steps, Decks, and Porches (including sleeping porches) .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Masonry and Stucco .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Roofs.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Gutters .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Fences .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Walls.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Demolition.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>New Construction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Additions.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>New Buildings.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Amendments and Severability .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Application and Instructions .....</b>	<b>Attachment A</b>



## **Introduction**

Arlington is fortunate in having a wide array of historically and/or architecturally significant buildings and landscapes from the eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth centuries, including the properties clustered in the seven established Historic Districts. Although the properties in the various Historic Districts vary in age, style, and level of ornamentation, all reflect Arlington's rich history. The Historic District Commissions work with property owners to ensure that the Town's historic buildings will continue to tell us of our past, while meeting our present needs.

## **Background**

The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, was created to protect and preserve the historic resources of the Commonwealth through a local review system that encourages and ensures compatible improvement and development. In general, local historic districts have three key purposes:

1. To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Commonwealth and its cities and towns;
2. To maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places; and
3. To assure that new construction is compatible with existing buildings and their historic relationship to other buildings in their vicinity.

Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C and Town Bylaws, Title VII, the Arlington Historic District Commissions are required to review the architectural appropriateness of most proposed exterior design changes, whether they be a minor alteration, new additions, or removal of trim or structures. Property owners in an Historic District are required to obtain a certificate from the Commission prior to starting any exterior work on buildings or structures. Please note that, by Town Bylaw, the building department cannot issue a building permit for exterior work or demolition without the necessary certificate from the Commission having jurisdiction over the area in which the property is located. Anyone contemplating exterior work should contact the Commission and property owners are encouraged to present preliminary plans to individual Commissioners or at informal Commission hearings to better understand Commission requirements.

The Design Guidelines contained in this booklet are, as their name implies, guidelines intended to encourage appropriate design by applicants and foster predictability in Commission actions. While the Commission has the authority, in its exercise of discretion, to permit applicants to depart from the Guidelines, applicants are encouraged to follow them to the greatest extent possible and should not expect that the Commission will permit applicants to depart from them in most circumstances. The Commission does not anticipate departing from certain of the Guidelines, such as that regarding artificial siding. Further, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may have greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

## What Changes are Reviewed

All changes to the exterior of a building that are subject to public view, whether from a public way, a private way open to public travel, a park, or a body of water must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Such changes include, but are not limited to, repairs, replacements and alterations to windows, doors, roofs, gutters, building materials, new construction, additions, fences, walls and changes in grade. For the purposes of determining visibility, existing and proposed wooden fences and landscaping are deemed not to block sight lines from public view. If there is a question regarding visibility, the final determination will be made by the chair of the Commission or the chair's designee.

The Commission does not review paint colors and will issue a certificate of Non-Applicability (see below) for ordinary like-kind (exact duplicate) repairs and replacements.

While landscaping is generally not subject to review by the Commission, the following are subject to review and approval by the Commission: changes to grade, outside HVAC equipment (excluding window units), and yard structures, including, but not limited to, fences, swimming pools, play houses and pergolas, etc.

## Certificate Process

Before beginning any work on an exterior element of a property or applying for a building permit, an owner of property in a local historic district must submit an application<sup>1</sup> to the Historic District Commission in order to obtain one of the following three certificates:

*Certificate of Non-Applicability.* If the Commission or its designee determines that the proposed work is (i) not subject to public view or (ii) is a like-kind replacement of existing conditions, then the Commission will issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability and the applicant may apply for a building permit.

*Certificate of Appropriateness.* If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, go to the Commission for a hearing, then the applicant will be required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission for approved alterations, additions and new construction before obtaining a building permit. For extremely minor work, the Commission may give its tentative approval by issuing a "Ten Day Letter of Approval". If there are no objections from either abutters or Commissioners to the Ten Day Letter of Approval, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness.

*Certificate of Hardship.* If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, go to the Commission for a hearing, then in certain rare cases the Commission may, in its sole discretion, issue a Certificate of Hardship if failure to approve the application would involve a substantial hardship, financial

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that a blank application as well as application instructions are attached to the end of this document as Attachment A.

or otherwise, to the applicant and the proposed work will not result in a significant detriment to the local historic district.

## **Design Review Principles**

When reviewing individual applications, the Commission will be guided by the following design principles, which have been adapted from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties:

*A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*

*The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property should be avoided.*

*Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.*

*Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*

*Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

*New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. New work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

*New additions and adjacent or related new construction which, if removed in the future, would impair the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment should be avoided.*

## General Design Guidelines

Although the points listed in these General Guidelines are covered in greater detail in the Specific Design Guidelines that begin on the following page, nine general guidelines are listed here to highlight their importance:

*Ornamental and decorative detailing should not be removed.*

*Deteriorated ornamental, decorative and characteristic architectural features should be repaired, rather than replaced.*

*No artificial siding should be installed.*

*Wood windows and metal casement windows should be retained.*

*There should be no new openings on visible façades, except to restore original or pre-existing openings.*

*Missing architectural features should be documented as authentic by photographic, physical, or historical evidence before they are reproduced.*

*Historic carriage barns and automobile garages should be preserved.*

*New fences should not act as visual barriers.*

*Traditional building materials should be used.*



## Specific Design Guidelines

### Walls and Trim

Trim and detailing should not be removed.

Replacement wood siding or shingles should replicate the materials, dimensions, detailing and patterns of the original.

Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, and artificial brick and stone, should not be used.

Shutters and shutter hardware should be retained or replicated exactly-in-kind and, if originally operable, mounted to remain so. Shutters may be removed for exterior painting of buildings, provided that the owner shall give the Commission prior notice and written assurance that all shutters and shutter hardware will be promptly reinstalled.

Awnings may be allowed if appropriate for the style of the building. They must be fabricated of canvas.

### Windows

The Commissions' preference is to retain true divided-lite windows whenever possible, thus existing windows should be repaired, not replaced. For houses of particular historical significance (due to age, style, owners, or events) this preference will generally not be waived.

If an applicant believes that an existing window cannot be repaired, the applicant's proposal for replacing window[s] will be reviewed on a window-by-window basis.

If a replacement window is proposed, the material and design of the existing window, including the casing, size, number of panes and type of window, should not be changed.

If a replacement window is proposed, it should not have muntin bars greater than 7/8" wide.

If a window in has insulating glass, it should have (i) permanently applied muntins no wider than 7/8" and (ii) internal spacer bars, but it should have neither flat muntin grids applied to the inside or outside panes nor removable muntin grids.

New and replacement windows should not be vinyl or metal clad.

Wood frames and sills should not be metal panned and the dimensions of window openings, jambs and sashes should not be changed.

The Commission encourages the repair/reconstruction of steel windows when they are original to the building. If such cannot be repaired or reconstructed, the Commission will consider windows of alternative materials that are designed to replicate exactly the appearance of the original steel windows.

Stained glass or decorative windows should be retained.

Storm windows are not reviewed by the Commission, provided that the installation of the storm windows does not alter the existing windows or frames.

Tinted glass should not be used.

### *Doors, Stairs, Steps, Decks, and Porches (including sleeping porches)*

Existing doors and door openings, including transoms and sidelights, should be repaired, not replaced.

If an applicant concludes that an existing door cannot be repaired or is an inappropriate door, the proposed replacement door should be made of wood and, if glazed with muntin bars, have true divided lights.

Porches and entrance porticos, including ornamental details, should be retained.

Open porches and porticos should not be enclosed or glazed.

Sleeping porches should be retained.

Porch and entry steps should be replicated in kind if original.

No steps, stairs, deck or porch structure should have exposed pressure-treated materials (PT lumber is appropriate a part of a concealed supporting framework only).

Steps, stairs, porch and deck materials should consist of fir, cedar, or mahogany.

Railing/baluster design and spacing should be historically appropriate and repairs to existing railings/balusters should maintain original proportions including height.

### *Masonry and Stucco*

Unpainted masonry should not be painted.

Sealants should not be applied to masonry, unless a sealant is necessary to prevent further deterioration. In all cases, the use of sealants is subject to review by the Commission.

Repointing masonry (sometimes referred to as tuck pointing) should be appropriate in terms of the type, color and aggregate of the mortar to be used and the width and profile of the joint. Joints should not be widened when cutting out old mortar. New mortar should be kept off the face of masonry.

Sandblasting should not be used to clean brick.

Variegated bricks should not be used, unless to match an existing condition.

Stucco should be repaired with a mixture that matches the original as closely as possible. Non-traditional resin based stuccos should not be used.

## Roofs

Slate and terra cotta tile roofing should be repaired or replicated in kind, including color, decorative patterns and style.

Rubber membrane roofing should not be used in visible locations.

The height and original pattern of decorative brickwork in chimneys should be maintained.

All decorative metal, such as iron cresting, finials and weathervanes should be retained.

Roof top HVAC and other mechanical elements, including soundproofing elements, should be placed out of view.

Roof decks and enclosures should be unobtrusive.

Patterns and textures of asphalt roofs should not be changed.

Skylights preferably should be placed out of view. When visible, skylights should be minimized in terms of both number and size. In no case will a “bubble-type” skylight be approved.

## Gutters

In general, the Commissions prefer to replace like with like — wood gutters with wood.

Copper may be used as a replacement for wood gutters where such gutters faithfully duplicate the molding profile of the original.

A “synthetic wood” product is available locally; it faithfully reproduces the wood gutter’s profile, but does not require maintenance beyond painting once installed. The Commissions can provide further information on this technology and local retailers.

Non-contributory structures (typically more modern in-fill construction dating from 1950 and later) shall given greater latitude regarding the range of materials allowed. Plastic gutter systems will typically not be allowed in the Districts.

Gutter systems including downspouts should be painted to match the existing structure.

Rarely, a homeowner may feel that none of the above should apply to his home. The Commissions strongly oppose making arbitrary exceptions to this guideline, but will listen to well-prepared arguments.

Lastly, a building in a historic district on which the gutters are currently aluminum (pre-establishment of district) may replace like with like. The Commissions note, however, that they prefer the gutters be replaced with the material that would have been present when the structure was first built.

## **Fences**

Iron fences, and original ornate wooden fences should be maintained.

The Historic District Commissions have jurisdiction to regulate fences fronting the street, including all fences, or portions thereof, that are forward of the front facade of a building, with corner lots having two “front” elevations. To erect such a fence, you must obtain a certificate.

Backyard fences are not subject to review, and will be granted certificates of non-applicability. However, in accord with the historic nature of the neighborhoods, we encourage such fences to be of a traditional style, e.g., flat boards on stringers, with a cap, and painted in a way that complements the house.

New fences should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings. Tall solid fences should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties.

Front yard fences , which are subject to review and must have a Certificate of Appropriateness to be erected, should not obscure the view of the house from the street. New front fences and the front yard portion of side fences should be open in character so as not to create visual barriers. Even though such fences were not historically found in Arlington, they will be allowed where stylistically appropriate. Examples include wrought iron (including aluminum imitation wrought iron), picket fences, and specially designed wooden fences. Metal fences should be historically

appropriate in design, materials, construction and assembly to the original period of the house. We have some reference materials available.

The location of fences is also important. A fence in the front yard should be adjacent to the sidewalk, with similar structures (if desired) extending back along the sidelines of the property. When an application is filed to erect a fence, the application **must** include a plot plan of the property showing the proposed location precisely. Where privacy is an issue, we suggest a “living” fence or hedge. Plantings are not subject to review by the Commissions.

The following should not be used: (i) plastic fences, (ii) chain link fences, (iii) split rail fences, (iv) stockade fences, (v) lattice fences, except as a side or rear yard garden element.

### **Walls**

Masonry walls should be maintained.

New walls should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings. Tall walls should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of walls should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties.

Brick walls should use historically appropriate brick. Bricks and mortar joints should be compatible in color, aggregate and joint profile with the building.

Stone walls may be dry laid or set in a mortar that is historically appropriate in color, aggregate and joint profile.

### **Demolition**

Structures, including additions and outbuildings, should not be demolished.

### **New Construction**

The Commission will review all proposed alterations of, and additions to, existing structures, and all new construction. Alterations are dealt with in preceding parts of the Guidelines, additions and new construction will be dealt with here. New construction, of either nature, should respect the existing streetscape. The historic relationship of buildings to the street and to other properties in the District, including setbacks and open spaces, should be maintained.

## **Additions**

Alterations and additions should be compatible with the character of the original building and earlier additions in terms of size, massing, material, location and detail.

The original portion of the building and earlier additions should continue to be recognizable apart from the addition by means of massing, articulation of setbacks, trim, and ornamental detail. Additions should be designed so that the primary elevations of the original building remain clearly delineated, and the original building is not rendered subordinate to or overwhelmed by the addition.

## **New Buildings**

A distinguishing characteristic preserved of many of Arlington's historic districts is the presence of generous street setbacks, spacious side yards, and generally, a greater level of open space than in many other parts of Arlington. It is precisely the nature and purpose of an historic district that it preserves important neighborhood features that have survived relatively intact from an earlier period in our history. These features should so remain for the benefit of the property owners and future generations. Thus, while a "legal lot" meeting minimum square footage requirements may be developed in other parts of the Town, or a small house torn down to be replaced with a larger one (sometimes known as "mansionization"), a different ethic applies in those areas which the Town has designed as historic districts.

Open space in the districts, although possibly qualifying under zoning as a "building lot" is in fact, part of the historic environment of a particular structure, adding not only ambiance but also economic value to the owner of the structure. The development of such lots will be considered only in limited circumstances, i.e., where it would not be incongruous with the historic building located on the land, or the district as a whole. For example, it is hard to conceive how new construction in an existing front yard could meet this test. New construction in a side yard might meet this test if (1) typical spacing of structures along the street can be maintained, (2) height is consistent with adjoining structures, (3) the style of architecture conforms to the predominant style of existing historic buildings in the vicinity, (4) the footprint – particularly the width – of the new building is appropriate in size and scale to adjoining buildings, and (5) the existing open space is not deemed to be an integral feature of the existing structure's historical setting.

In reviewing such projects, the Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size, massing, scale, height, and shape of the building or structure in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is proposed to be situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity. In order to assist the Commission in making such determinations, particularly in areas of uneven terrain, a three-dimensional topographic model may be required. The Commission may impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the Zoning By-law.

New structures should be finished on the exterior with materials, composition, and architectural details that are consistent with the architectural style predominant in the vicinity. Individual

features such as doors and windows should be compatible in proportion, size, shape, location, and pattern with similar features on other contributing structures in the district.

Simply put, when a new structure has been erected in an historic district, the reaction of a passer-by should not be “how did *that* get here?”

### **Amendments and Severability**

The Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines.

If any part of these Guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that part shall be severed from the text, and the remaining sections of these Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.







# Arlington Historic District Commissions

## Application for Certificate (Read instructions on reverse before completing form)

For Commission Use Only:

Date Rec: \_\_\_\_\_

Hearing Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Certificate #: \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor: \_\_\_\_\_

### Certificate Requested:

- . Appropriateness – for work described herein
- . Non-Applicability – for the following reason(s):
  - ☐ Not subject to public view
  - ☐ Maintenance, repair, or replacement using same design and materials
  - ☐ Proposed change specifically excluded from review under Bylaw
  - ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- . Hardship – financial or otherwise and does not conflict substantially with the intent and purposes of the Bylaw

### General Information:

Property Address \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_

Owner(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Owner's Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_

Owner's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant (if not Owner) \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Relationship to Owner \_\_\_\_\_

Contractor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Architect \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Dates of Anticipated Work: Start \_\_\_\_\_ Completion \_\_\_\_\_

**Description of Proposed Work:** (attach additional pages as necessary) Please include a description of how the proposed work (if a change or addition) is historically and architecturally compatible with the building and the District as a whole.

---



---



---



---



---

**Required Documentation to be Attached:** (see attached instructions) Failure to provide sufficient documentation could delay action upon application.

- . ☐ Plans/scale drawings ☐ Existing and proposed site or plot plans ☐ Existing conditions photographs of structure and areas affected ☐ Material samples and/or product literature
- . ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the attached instructions and, to the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this application is accurate and complete. I also give permission for members of the AHDC to access the property for the purpose of reviewing this application and work done under any certificate issued to me.

Owners Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Application Information and Instructions

**CONTACT THE COMMISSION BEFORE YOU BEGIN ANY EXTERIOR WORK WITHIN AN HISTORIC DISTRICT:** Property owners in an Historic District are required to obtain a certificate from the Commission prior to starting any exterior work on buildings or structures. Once an application is received, a formal public hearing will be scheduled to consider the application, public notice will be published, and abutters and interested parties will be notified. Please note that, by Town Bylaw, the building department cannot issue a building permit for exterior work or demolition without the necessary certificate from this Commission. Anyone contemplating exterior work should contact the Commission's Executive Secretary at the number provided below. Property owners are encouraged to present preliminary plans to individual Commissioners or at informal Commission hearings to better understand Commission requirements.

**Summary of Commission Authority:** The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, was created to protect and preserve the historic resources of the Commonwealth through a local review system that encourages and ensures compatible improvement and development. Under Chapter 40 C and Town Bylaw, the Arlington Historic District Commissions are required to review the architectural appropriateness of most proposed exterior design changes, whether they be a minor alteration, new additions, or removal of trim or structures. The applicant bears the burden of establishing that the proposed work is not inconsistent with the historic nature of the district. The Commission will issue a certificate of non-applicability (often without a formal hearing) for items specifically excluded from review such as: exterior features not subject to public view, or such items as specifically identified by Bylaw such as paint color, color of roof material, storm doors and windows, air conditioners, lawn ornaments, or most landscaping. Failure to comply with the Arlington Town Bylaws establishing the Historic Districts by failing to obtain a required certificate or refusing to cease uncertificated work can result in penalties of up to \$50 per day.

### **Types of Certificates:**

Certificate of Appropriateness – Required for exterior alterations and new construction that are subject to public view unless specifically exempted by the Bylaw.

Certificate of Non-Applicability – Issued for matters that are specifically excluded from review under the Bylaw.

Certificate of Hardship – Issued when the denial of a Certificate would constitute a hardship, financial or otherwise, on the property owner and if the proposed work does not conflict substantially with the intent and purposes of the Bylaw. Approval of a Certificate of Hardship requires detailed documentation of specific hardship to an individual property owner.

**Required Documentation:** At a minimum, the documentation specifically listed on the application form is required. Please check off the appropriate boxes on the application to indicate that the necessary documentation is attached. If necessary, documentation not included with the application can be filed by the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the hearing month. In an emergency, required documentation can be presented at the formal hearing, however, this may delay action on the application. Based on the complexity or unique nature of a particular project, the Commission may, as allowed by law, require additional information. Failure to provide sufficient documentation could delay approval or be cause for a negative determination.

**Application Deadlines:** The Commission typically meets on the fourth Thursday of each month (third Thursday in November and December) at the Whittemore-Robbins House, 670R Massachusetts Avenue (behind the Robbins Library). To allow for the publishing of legally required notices prior to individual hearings, completed applications must be received three to four weeks prior to the Commission hearing date. Specific deadlines for each hearing can be obtained from the Commission's Executive Secretary. In most cases, failure to meet these deadlines will delay scheduling of a formal hearing until the following month. Upon approval of an application at a formal hearing, a certificate will be issued approximately one week from the date of the hearing and a copy will be sent to the Building Inspector to allow issuance of a permit.

**Contact Information:** Inquiries and completed applications should be directed to Carol Greeley, Executive Secretary, 15 Temple Street, Arlington MA 02476, (781) 316-3265, or [cgreeley@comcast.net](mailto:cgreeley@comcast.net). Any additional questions can be addressed to the Commissions' Chair Stephen Makowka at (617) 520-0220(w) or 781-643-6054(h).

